

Immigration—Part 1

Reasons for Immigration

Between 1866 and 1915, more than a million immigrants poured into the United States. Both push and pull factors played a part in this vast migration. Push factors are conditions that drive people from their homes. Pull factors are conditions that attract immigrants to a new area.

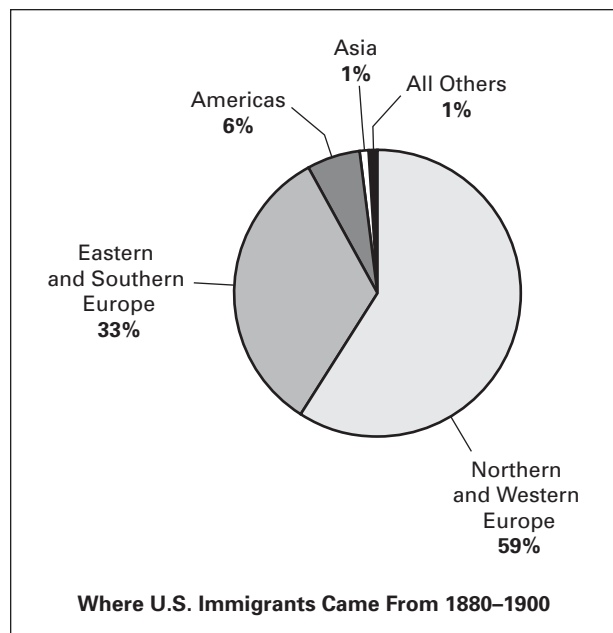
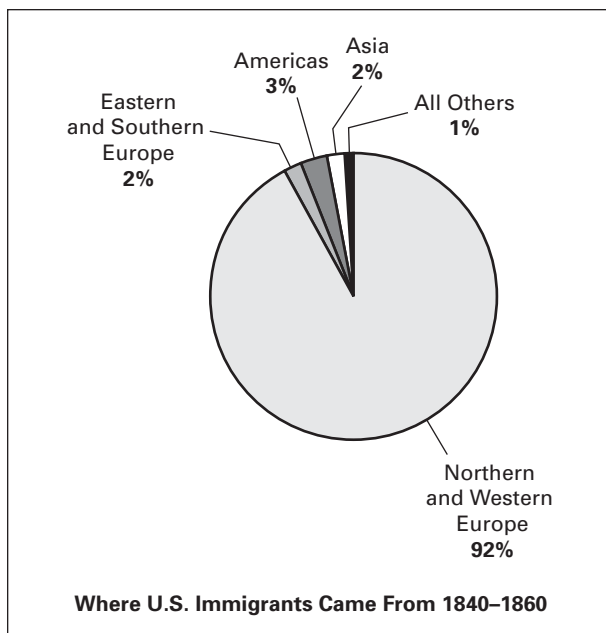
Push Factors

Many immigrants were small farmers or landless farm workers. As European populations grew, land for farming became scarce. Small farms could barely support the families who worked them. In some areas, new farm machines replaced farm workers.

Another factor was political and religious persecution that pushed many people to leave their homes. In the late 1800s, the Russian government supported pogroms or organized attacks on Jewish villages. “Every night,” recalled a Jewish girl who fled Russia, “they were chasing after us, to kill everyone.” Millions of Jews fled Russia and eastern Europe to settle in the American cities.

Persecution was also a push factor for Armenian immigrants. The Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire (present-day Turkey). Between the 1890s and the 1920s, the Ottoman government killed a million or more Armenians. Many fled, eventually settling in California and elsewhere in the United States.

War and hardship were other push factors. In 1913, a civil war raged in Mexico and this caused thousands of Mexicans to cross the border into the American Southwest. Poverty and hardship in China drove many Chinese to make new homes across the Pacific. After gold was discovered in California, thousands of Chinese poured into California attracted, like so many others, by tales of “mountains of gold.”



Pull Factors

The promise of freedom and hopes for a better life attracted poor and oppressed people from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Often one bold family member—usually a young single male—set off for the United States. Before long, he would write home with news of the rich land across the ocean or across the border. Once settled, he would send for family members to join him.

Once settled, the newcomers helped pull neighbors from the old country to the United States. In the 1800s, one out of every ten Greeks left their homes for the United States. Thousands of Italians, Poles, and eastern European Jews also sailed to America. Jobs were another pull factor. American factories needed workers and factory owners sent agents to Europe and Asia to hire workers at low wages. Steamship companies competed to offer low fares for the ocean crossing and railroads posted notices in Europe advertising cheap land in the American west.

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